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May Swenson

Charles Scribner's Sons . New York

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ICONOGRAPHS

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I C O N O G R A P H S

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POEMS

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ICONOGRAPHS

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POEMS

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ICONOGRAPHS

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS . NEW YORK

P
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S

BLEEDING

Stop bleeding said the knife.
I would if I could said the cut.
Stop bleeding you make me messy with this blood.
I'm sorry said the cut.
Stop or I will sink in farther said the knife.
Don't said the cut.
The knife did not say it couldn't help it but
it sank in farther.
If only you didn't bleed said the knife I wouldn't
have to do this.
I know said the cut I bleed too easily I hate
that I can't help it I wish I were a knife like
you and didn't have to bleed.
Well meanwhile stop bleeding will you said the knife.
Yes you are a mess and sinking in deeper said the cut I
will have to stop.
Have you stopped by now said the knife.
I've almost stopped I think.
Why must you bleed in the first place said the knife.
For the same reason maybe that you must do what you
must do said the cut.
I can't stand bleeding said the knife and sank in farther.
I hate it too said the cut I know it isn't you it's
me you're lucky to be a knife you ought to be glad about that.
Too many cuts around said the knife they're
messy I don't know how they stand themselves.
They don't said the cut.
You're bleeding again.
No I've stopped said the cut see you are coming out now the
blood is drying it will rub off you'll be shiny again and clean.
If only cuts wouldn't bleed so much said the knife coming
out a little.
But then knives might become dull said the cut.
Aren't you still bleeding a little said the knife.
I hope not said the cut.
I feel you are just a little.
Maybe just a little but I can stop now.
I feel a little wetness still said the knife sinking in a
little but then coming out a little.
Just a little maybe just enough said the cut.
That's enough now stop now do you feel better now said the knife.
I feel I have to bleed to feel I think said the cut.
I don't I don't have to feel said the knife drying now
becoming shiny.

WOMEN

Women
should be
pedestals
moving
pedestals
moving
to the
motions
of men

Or they
should be
little horses
those wooden
sweet
oldfashioned
painted
rocking
horses

the gladdest things in the toyroom

The
pegs
of their
ears
so familiar
and dear
to the trusting
fists
To be chafed

feelingly
and then
unfeelingly
To be
joyfully
ridden
rockingly
ridden until
the restored

egos dismount and the legs stride away

Immobile
sweetlipped
sturdy
and smiling
women
should always
be waiting

willing
to be set
into motion
Women
should be
pedestals
to men

THE DNA MOLECULE
THE DNA MOLECULE
THE DNA MOLECULE

is The Nude Descending a Staircase
a circular one.
See the undersurfaces
of the spiral
treads and
the spaces
in between.

She is descending and at the same time
ascending and she moves around herself. For
she is the staircase "a protoplasmic framework
an internal scaffolding
that twists and turns."

She is a double helix mounting and dismounting
around the swivel of her imaginary spine. The Nude
named DNA can be constructed as a model with matches and
a ribbon of tape. Be sure to use only 4 colors on 2 white
strands of twistable tape. "Only matches of complementary
colors may be placed opposite each other. The pairs
are to be red and green and yellow and blue."

Make your model as high as the Empire
State Building and you have an acceptable
replica of The Nude.

But and this is harder you must make her move
in a continuous coil
an alpha helix a double spiral
downward and upward at once
and you must make her increase while at the same
time occupying the same field.
She must be made "to maintain a basic topography"
changing yet remaining stable

if she is to perform her function which is to produce
and reproduce the microsphere.

Such a sphere is invisible to but omnipresent
in the naked eye of The Nude.
It contains "a central region and an outer membrane"
making it able to divide "to make exact copies of
itself without limit."

The Nude has "the capacity for
replication and transcription" of
all genesis. She ingests and
regurgitates the genetic material
it being the material of her own
cell-self. From single she becomes
double and from double single.

As a woman ingests the demon sperm and with the same membrane
regurgitates the mitotic double of herself upon the

MOLECULE produces the same size
slide of time so the DNA
pop at the waistline of its viscous drop
a new microsphere which proceeds singly to grow
as herself to divide and double itself.
in order to double and double to single and
So from single to double and double to single and
mounting while descending she
expands while contracts she proliferates while
disappearing at both of her ends.

Remember that red can only be opposite green
and blue opposite yellow. Remember that the
complementary pairs of matches must differ slightly in
length "for nature's pairs can be made only with units
whose structures permit an interplay of forces
between the partners."

I fixed a blue match opposite a red
match of the same length
in defiance of the rules pointed them
away from the center on the double-stranded
tape. I saw laid a number of eggs

on eggs on the sticky side of a twig.
I saw a worm with many feet grow out
of an egg.

The worm climbed the twig a single helix and gobbled
the magnified edge of a leaf
in quick enormous bites.

It then secreted out of itself a gray floss
with which it wrapped itself tail first and so on
until it had completely muffled
and encased itself head last as in a mummy pouch.

I saw plushy irridescent wings push
moistly out of the pouch. At first glued
together they began to part. On each wing

I saw a large blue eye
open forever in the expression of resurrection.
The new Nude released the flanges
of her wings
stretching herself to touch

at all points
the outermost rim
of the noösphere.

I saw that for her body from which the
wings expanded
she had retained
the worm.

I LOOK AT MY HAND

I look at my hand and see
it is also his and hers;
the pads of the fingers his,

the wrists and knuckles hers.
In the mirror my pugnacious eye
and ear of an elf, his;

my tamer mouth and slant
cheekbones hers.
His impulses my senses swarm,
her hesitations they gather.
Father and Mother
who dropped me,

an acorn in the wood,
repository of your shapes
and inner streams and circles,

you who lengthen toward heaven,
forgive me
that I do not throw

the replacing green
trunk when you are ash,
When you are ash, no
features shall there be,
tangled of you,
interlacing hands and faces

through me
who hide, still hard,
far down under your shades--

and break my root, and prune my buds,
that what can make no replica
may spring from me.

I'LL BE

Young,
I was too young
to see and think and say: "I am young
I am too young."

Old,
I am too young
to see and think, and say: "I am old,
I was young.
I am too old."

Older,
I'll be too old
to see, and think, and say: "I was too young,
too old."

Older,
I'll be too old
to... I'll be dead,
too. Be dead
to... Dead
I'll be! Dead,
I'll be.

THE SHAPE OF DEATH

What does love look like? We know the shape of death.
Death is a cloud, immense and awesome. At first a
lid is lifted from the eye of light. There is a
clap of sound. A white blossom belches from the
jaw of fright. A pillared cloud churns from
white to gray, like a monstrous brain that bursts
and burns-- then turns sickly black, spilling
away, filling the whole sky with ashes of dread.
Thickly it wraps, between the clean seas and the
moon, the earth's green head. Trapped in its
cocoon, its choking breath, we know the shape
of death. Death is a cloud. What does love look

like? Is it a particle, a star, invisible entirely,
beyond the microscope and Palomar? A dimension past
the length of hope? Is it a climate far and fair,
that we shall never dare discover? What is its
color, and its alchemy? Is it a jewel in the earth,
can it be dug? Or dredged from the sea? Can
it be bought? Can it be sown and harvested? Is it
a shy beast to be caught? Death is a cloud-- immense,
a clap of sound. Love is little and not loud. It
nests within each cell, and it cannot be split. It
is a ray, a seed, a note, a word, a secret motion of
our air and blood. It is not alien-- it is near--
our very skin, a sheath to keep us pure of fear.

THE MOBILE
IN BACK OF THE SMITHSONIAN

glanced at is not realized
to be in motion.

Rotates so slowly silently twists
gradually mutates.

A steel ribbon an altering bow
on a pin on a tall triangle its black pediment.

Passing toward it around it antstreaming under it
on into the doorways or away they do

not notice
except as obstruction

perhaps decoration
what

is dismissed with
a shift to the

next objective
next object.

Or if they fasten
upon it their glances

take off.
their eyes inattentive

flick too quick to find it
moves.

Nor stop in the strolling cloud
of mind to claim how it

moves.
How slow how secret as time.

Never to follow its transforms to
count its changes

eyeflow with its outlines eyesit central
in its inspaces anticipate the uncurling

jointures of a figure forever unstable.
Never to know.

The bridge of Discover they do not lift an eye
to and climb

but crawl eyes across other eyes crawling where
others cross.

Automatic feet follow feet follow
groupmobile sightstoppered see-ers

steered streaming to the Labels
directed to collected at the Plaques the

information Frames the strips of Print
eyelevel.

Not to the object but to the explanation of
the object.

Not to the mirror declaring the corridor of
the pupil plunging straight horizontal a

drawbridge into the palace of the mind
where at the point of a triangle Universe

unloops entwines unknots involutes
coexistent beginsgrowsdiesendsbegins.

But to the title on the bottom frame
of the mirror the signature in the

righthand corner to the type on the strip
under glass beside the thing on the wall.

To the bronze lettering on the base of the pediment.
At which they have to stoop.

A double deviational Mobius band of steel
persuasively merges emerges expands in an

undefined sequence of changes.
An elegance unnoticed by no seam

deciding beginning
by no limit denoting end

or whether or if or where
is completion or source

for its permutations.
What without label

rears invisible
without sound below

the speed of sight
covertly turns.

Nor does the man at the
lobby desk know if you

ask him Who made it.
Too slowly for my eye

at first to see that it
moves

when I move
my pencil to diagram

its alterations it
moves

too fast to track
them all to trace

them a sidwinder
eluding all my

eye'shand's computations.
Now some of them notice

me motionless looking
up at unnoticeable motion.

They stop and look
at me.

And then at what I look
at but then at me.

And then at each other looking
at me.

And then at each other walking on walk on
look back at me.

NOTE: The Mobile is by Jose de Rivera,
mounted outside the new wing of the
Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

WELCOME ABOARD THE TURBOJET ELECTRA

Why do they say 31,000 feet? Why
not yards or miles? Why four
cigarettes and no match? Fly
Winston and see the world-- red, white,
filtered, slick in cellophane. We goose
our yellow corn tips into the pink
leftover straw(sic)berry mousse
sequined with ash. Coffee comes
in a plasti-cup and sunlight
drills the rivets on the jet-
stream stack just inches beyond
the window and our nose, yet
the inner pane is cool, a breeze--
is it from outer space?--
pleasantly swizzles our face.

Is that St. Louis and the Gateway
to the West? Strident aluminum
hairpin the light tweaks down there.
No, no hairpins anymore. No
bobby pins. No
bobs. What do they call them, those
wire sausage things that build high hair?
Now sun is staining a cleft in cloud
like dogpiss on snow.

What do we do, our coffee's cold, it's
bumpy over Texas? Stewardess
wipes an old man's front, he spilled
his tray. We sneak to set
ours on the floor. The nose
lifts, bucks, beginning banking,
wing slips down. A shoe
ahead gets soaked under the seat,
the foot pretending sleep pretends
no notice. Maybe that's the U.
of Texas Tower, its stone prick due
visible in five minutes, which
would mean this mother'll be on time.
Around which how many people was it died?
Hope when the pilot circles
Austin we're on the right side.

THE JAMES BOND MOVIE

The popcorn is greasy, and I forgot to bring a Kleenex. A pill that's a bomb inside the stomach of a man inside The Embassy blows up. Eruc-tations of flame, luxurious cauliflowers, giganticize into motion. The entire 29-ft. screen is orange, is crackling, flesh and brick bursting, blackening, smithereened. I unwrap a Dentyne and, while jouncing my teeth in rubber-tongue-smart-ing clove, try with the 2-inch-wide paper to

blot butter off my fingers. A bubble-bath, room-sized, in which 14 girls, delectable and sexless, are twist-topped Creamy Freezes, (their blond, red, brown, pinkish, lavender or silver wiglets screwed that high, and varnished) scrub-tickle a lone male, whose chest has just the right amount and distribution of not too curly hair. He's nervously pretending to defend his modesty. His crotch, below the waterline, is also below the

frame-- but unsubmerged all 28 slick foamy boobs. Their makeup fails to let the girls look naked. Caterpillar lashes, black and thick, lush lips glossed pink like the gum I pop and chew, Contacts on all the eyes that are mostly blue, they're nose-perfect replicas of each other. I've got most of the grease off and on to this little square of paper. I'm folding it now, making creases with my nails.

FEEL ME

"Feel me to do right," our father said
on his death bed. We did not quite
know-- in fact, not at all-- what he meant.
His last whisper was spent as through a slot in a wall.
He left us a key, but how did it
fit? "Feel me
to do right." Did it mean

that, though he died, he would be felt
through some aperture, or by some unseen instrument
our dad just then had come
to know? So, to do right always, we need but feel his
spirit? Or was it merely
his apology for dying? "Feel that I
do right in not trying, as you insist, to stay

on your side. There is the wide
gateway and the splendid tower,
and you implore me to wait here, with the worms!"
Had he defined his terms, and could we discriminate
among his motives, we might
have found out how to "do right" before we died-- supposing
he felt he suddenly knew

what dying was.
"You do wrong because you do not feel
as I do now" was maybe the sense. "Feel me, and emulate
my state, for I am becoming less dense--
I am feeling right, for the first
time." And then the vessel burst, and we were kneeling
around an emptiness.

We cannot feel our
father now. His power courses through us, yes, but he--
the chest and cheek, the foot and palm,
the mouth of oracle-- is calm. And we still seek
his meaning. "Feel me," he said,
and emphasized that word.
Should we have heard it as a plea

for a caress-- A constant caress,
since flesh was all that we could do right
if we would bless him? The dying must feel
the pressure of that
question-- lying flat, turning cold
from brow to heel-- the hot
cowards there above

protesting their love, and saying
"What can we do? Are you all
right?" While the wall opens
and the blue night pours through. "What
can we do? We want to do what's right."
"Lie down with me, and hold me, tight. Touch me. Be
with me. Feel with me. Feel me, to do right."

THE FINGERS

"If it moves you, move." The fingers
on the upturned bell-shaped glass, three strangers

to each other, waited. In an oval on the table
the alphabet, strung on squares from the Scrabble,

waited for the spirit to choose. Two signs,
like small grave-slabs, of paper with blue lines,

fixed YES and NO at the orbit's ends.
The fingers felt like fools together. The hands

separately trembled. Anticipation's cold
tickled the elbows. Willing to be fooled

wanting a happening, a three-part ghost
gathered itself under the glass from the moist

swirls of the fingertips. "Is anybody there?"
Alert for intentions, three pairs

of eyes, meeting above the lot
in the lamplight, declared no plot.

"Is anybody there? Let us know."
The giggling glass slid around to NO.

"Nobody there? But you're speaking.
Tell us if any of us here is faking.

"Spell out the name-- but first, answer if YES."
"G"-- the ghost walked out its word-- "U E S S."

Unlikely a king finger rode the joking throne.
Not acquainted till tonight, each felt pawn

to the others. But some compound sprite wanted
to rule, without detection from its "bodies," and hinted

at cheating as a distraction.
Would it produce some sort of resurrection?

"Let's ask it a personal question. What is a ghost
made of? What element is there most

like it? Tell us now, so we can understand."
The fingers throbbed as brothers on one hand,

that swept the glass out: It touched "B"
then stammered "L" and "O"-- "O" again, then "D."

Moved? We were so moved, we grew
hysterical. A poltergeist must have hopped aboard, too.

Jumping, the glass moved round to spell JUMPS, JUMPS-- until
it fell. BLOOD JUMPS is what the fingers had to tell.

ELECTRONIC SOUND

A pebble swells to a boulder at low speed
At 7½ ips a hiss is a hurricane.
The basin drain
is Charybdis sucking
a clipper down, the ship
a paperclip
whirling. Or gargle, brush your teeth, HEAR
a winded horse's esophagus lurch
on playback at 15/16. Perch
a quarter on edge on a plate, spin:
a locomotive's wheel is wrenched loose,
wobbles down the line to slam the caboose,
keeps on snicking over the ties
till it teeters on the embankment,
bowl down a cement
ramp, meanders onto the turnpike
and into a junkhole
of scrapped cars. Ceasing to roll,
it shimmies, falters...
sudden inertia causes
pause.
Then a round of echoes
descending, a minor yammer
as when a triangle's nicked by the slimmest hammer.

THE GRAIN OF OUR EYE (A Scientific Abstract)

Anti-matter it is called.
Awkwardness in naming the
nonthing unnoticeably not
occurring anywhere.
Mistaken to assume it (the
non-it) an unoccupant of
nospace, a simple non-x-
istent. No, it's (non-it's
not yes) the very grain
of our eye. As hair-crack
in microscope adds x-tra
leg to fly, proliferating
nonlegs in all inconsequent
offspring. Or subtracting
an ex and so re-non-producing
onspring. No is On by
mirror-proof, and Yes is
almost Eyes. A ton (or not
notice) of anti-matter weighs
(some ways, the sum's) the
same as empty sack of non-
feathers, and is the size
of Between, which varies by
a pivot (as on schoolboy's
compass) x-cept that this
tool's aim's to make ends
meet meticulously in-x-act.
What's its (non-its or nits)
anti-shape? Well, turn in
itside out and cross out
out. Now print if you can't
a non-positive pro-negative
of the after-image (or pre-
if-you-fer) of 0 in the
word word, when warped by
a million or so small but
unappreciable elisions,
collisions, incisions and
noninverted visions between
(between being the wee-in
intwixt the hole problem)
0 and the nonidentical
rag content of unavoidably
aging pages in that thick
folio entitled to no title
unless Void. We learn not
how, but how Not, since

one is almost own, knot
two. (That's nearer out.)
To avoid a void, forget
get, take care to be care-
less. Lesscare takes
development, requires a
dark room in the nonbrain
that's tense, prehensile,
unintentionally indented
with dense pre-eidetic non-
ideas. Taodal blindness
by its elf won't do.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION - A MERGER

When Galileo Galilei first turned a telescope on the heavens,
Was St. Peter buried on Vatican hill,
400 years ago, his revelations were astounding. Jupiter,
the site of the great Roman Catholic basilica
he found, has its own miniature system of planets,
that bears his name? Last week Pope Paul....
or moons. He saw the mountains of the moon,
gave his support to that theory, announcing that bones
spots on the sun and the crescent shape of Venus.
discovered in 1953 under the basilica
He found that the Milky Way Galaxy
had been identified to his satisfaction as those of
of which we are a part is actually formed from billions of
the saint. For Christians.... it is not an idle question...
distant, dim stars. Since then, telescopes have gradually increased
The claims.... rest on two arguments
in size and quality, culminating in 1948
concerning Peter: First, that the statement
in completion of the great reflector on Mount Palomar
of Jesus quoted by Matthew: "Thou art Peter, and
in California. This instrument, with a parabolic mirror
upon this rock I shall build my church"
200 inches in diameter, has been to modern astronomy what
is literally true... and second, that the apostle
Galileo's instrument was to science in the 17th Century.
Peter was bishop of Rome, and thus the first
It has carried man's ken toward the outer fringes
in an unending series of Roman bishops--or--popes,
of the universe and it has enlarged his knowledge of the galaxies.
who embody the full authority to guide
It first identified the strange quasars that seem to be the
the Christian Church. In 1939, the
most distant observable objects and the light-collecting power of
Vatican excavations beneath the main altar of St. Peter's

its huge mirror has brought into view peculiar stars,
 began to uncover a series of tombs, which
 that, while not very distant, are too dim to be observed with
 was held to include the tomb of Peter. But
 other instruments.... While others are being built, none comes close to
 the first announcement
 the 200-inch Hale Telescope-- with one exception. That is
 came only in 1949, when Pope Pius XII stated that
 the 236-inch reflector being built by the Soviet Union near Zelenchuk
 an urn containing the remains of the apostle
 in the Caucasus.... Apparently the Russians hope to dazzle the world
 had been uncovered.... Later, however, the bones
 as they did with their Sputnik in 1957, by a surprise announcement after
 in the urn were shown to be those of a woman.
 their first look into realms previously beyond reach....
 During the 1950's, Professor Margherita Guarducci,
 While the Russians, with their new instrument, will be able to see things
 a Vatican expert on inscriptions, argued that
 no one else can, their field of view will be limited by
 writings on walls beneath the altar pointed to
 their geography.... Because almost all of the world's great observatories
 a particular niche as the resting place
 are north of the Equator, the southern part of the sky
 of Peter's remains. Earlier a team of Vatican archeologists
 is by far the least explored. The center
 had reported secretly to the Pope that the niche,
 of the Milky Way Galaxy lies there
 and a box in it, were empty. But Professor Guarducci--
 plus the two nearest baby-galaxies (the Clouds
 persisted, reporting that Monsignor Kaas, then secretary
 of Magellan).... One of the dreams of American astronomers
 and administrator for the Fabric of St. Peter's, told her
 is the placing of a large telescope
 that he and two workmen had removed some bones
 into orbit above the earth's atmosphere.
 from the niche without the knowledge of Vatican

This has become possible with the giant Saturn
archeologists. It was these bones that Pope Paul
rockets designed to send men to
last week identified as those of St. Peter.
the moon. Our present view of
European archeologists familiar with the
the heavens can be likened to that of a lobster beneath the
Vatican diggings remain privately skeptical but publicly
murky waters of Long Island Sound.
silent.... Further investigations will likely be
A telescope above the ocean of air would open
colored by the Pope's decision to commit some of
new realms of knowledge concerning our
his prestige to a circumstantial argument the
nearest neighbors in space, as well as
bones in question are indeed Peter's. The Vatican
the nature of the universe as a whole.
has got itself into a position where its case can't be
However, as with other grandiose science projects, the problem is
proved scientifically,' an American archeologist...
cost.... American action may be delayed until
said last week. He said, "We'll probably never know
the Russians have done it first.
whose bones they are."

Note: The text is taken verbatim (except for deletions where indicated) and interwoven from two columns by Walter Sullivan and John Leo, respectively, in the New York Times of Sunday, June 30, 1968, p. 10-E.

The
POWER
HOUSE

Close to my
place is the
power house.
I knew there
wouldn't be
anybody in it.
It's beauti-
ful. Like a
church. It
works all by
itself. And
with almost no
sound. All glass.
And a tall square
tower on it.
Colored lights
shine from within.
They color the
glass. Pink. Pale
green. Not stained.
Not that kind. And
not fragile. Just
light. Light weight.
A red rod erect
from the tower

blinking on top red. Behind it gray wings of motion. A fan
of light opening and folding somewhere in the west of town.
Periodic as a metronome.

The crickets were talking electricity. A white Spitz barked
at me though my sneakers made no noise. I walked up the
slight slope-- it's wide-- to the power house. Went past
the doorway. Big as a barn door squared. Big horse I thought.
I saw through the doorway gray metal coils. All the clean
machinery and engines. I don't know what to call it all. I
don't know the names.

Painted pretty colors slick and clean. I knew there
wouldn't be anybody there. Nobody needs to work there
I thought. And walked past that door farther on.

White lights icy and clean. Not blazing. Cool.
Gossamer. The pink and green like-sherbet-colors bathing the gray machines.
Came to a place where vapor cooled my skin. A breeze made by waterspray
up high. And there was white steam unfurling
evaporating against the dark.

Down lower a red transparent ball on a pedestal. Incandescent. Big. A
balloon mystery. Inside through another doorway I saw a hook painted
yellow. Huge and high enough to lift a freight car.

I stood looking in-- my shadow so long and black
from the streaming lights.

And I was wrong. Somebody moved in the powerhouse.
Came from between the coils and giant tubes.
Down off the balcony on the steel stairway smooth
and slow. Like floating. Like not having to
look or think. I thought he'd be a Negro but he
wasn't. He didn't see me. Didn't need to see
anything. He had a red face and a blue uniform.

ORBITER 5 SHOWS
HOW EARTH LOOKS FROM THE MOON
There's a woman in the earth, sitting on
her heels. You see her from the back, in three-
quarter profile. She has a flowing pigtail. She's
holding something in her right hand-- some holy jug. Her left arm is thinner,
in a gesture like a dancer. She's the Indian Ocean. Asia is
light swirling up out of her vessel. Her pigtail points to Europe
and her dancer's arm is the Suez Canal. She is a woman
in a square kimono,
bare feet tucked beneath the tip of Africa. Her tail of long hair is
the Arabian Peninsula.

A woman in the earth.

A man in the moon.

Blessed is the man of color
for his blood is rich with
the nuclear sap of the sun.
Blessed is his spirit which
a savage history has
refined to intercept
whitest lightnings of
vision. Blessed the neck
of the black man made
muscular by the weight of
the yoke made proud
bursting the lynch rope.
Blessed his body meek on
the slave block thunderous
on the porch of revolt.
Blessed his head hewn with
animal beauty for he has
grappled as the lion bled
as the lamb and extracted
the excellence of each for
his character. Blessed the
black and the white of his
eye.

For Martin Luther King
April 4, 1968

THE LOWERING*

The
flag
is folded
lengthwise,
and lengthwise
again,

folding toward the
open edge,
so that the union of stars
on the blue
field remains outward in full view;

a triangular folding is then begun
at the striped end,
by bringing the corner of the folded edge
to the open edge;
the outer point, turned inward

along the open edge,
forms the next triangular fold;
the folding continued so, until the end is reached,
the final corner tucked between
the folds of the blue union,
the form of the folded flag

is found to resemble that
of a 3-cornered pouch, or thick cocked hat.
Take this flag, John Glenn, instead of a friend;

instead of a brother, Edward
Kennedy, take this flag;

instead of a father, Joe
Kennedy, take this flag;
this flag instead of a husband, Ethel
Kennedy, take this flag;

this 9-times-folded
red-white-striped, star-spotted-blue flag,
tucked and pocketed neatly, Nation,
instead of a leader, take

this folded flag. Robert
Kennedy, coffin without coverlet,

beside this hole in the grass,
beside your brother, John
Kennedy, in the grass,
take, instead of a country,
this folded flag:

AN OLD FIELD JACKET

At the Army Surplus Store I bought an old field jacket,
because of the snapdown pockets and the attached hood
rolled up and zippered inside the collar. Good
for fishing, camping, wet days on the beach.
Wrinkled, buckled, faded to swamp-mud-green,
the harsh cloth's wonderfully softened, sateened
by wear and machine cleaning.

Sticky resinous marks still on it, above the breast
pockets and on the arms, are where ID patches, chevrons,
and whatnot, were ripped off. A blue-white phosphorescent strip
sewn down the back, when it walks in the dark, still glows.

Has it single-filed on sinister muck and brush patrols,
hunched in hot foxholes? Has the hood
under a hard hat heard mortar rain?
For all I know, it used to smell of cold
gun grease, cartridge powder, maybe blood. Smears of paint,
or something, are on it, and other not quite washed out stains.

It's loose on me, practical, a good
wind-breaker, and not too long.
Came cheap, and will last forever, the cloth's that strong.
But the best is those four big pockets
to keep cigarettes and matches dry
in, carry car keys, flashlight, a fishknife, sinkers and bait--
a bird book, even-- anything I want.

Don't know why it fits my shoulders. Must have shrunk
getting processed, disinfected, drycleaned for
the Army Surplus Store. Wonder who wore
it, and what for? A label by the hang-up loop in the lining says:
Cotton OG 107 Mil-J-4883C US Army-- and then September 1962.

Don't know how near it came to a shooting war--
and wearing it, I hope, is the closest I'll ever get--
women not being drafted yet.
(But if we start using their garb, is that what we're asking for?)

Standing up out of a tent into the rain
this summer, Montauk or Maine--
taking a lungful of dark before light,
tying the drawstring on the hood,
out in the open, feeling equipped, protected good,
I might say:
Let's start the dirty day
early. Let's imagine military dawn.

SPRING BY ROBERT LOWELL (PHOTOGRAPH BY TRUDI FULLER)

...only an ear is in the spring.

Sunlight in Central Park it could
be:yond his shoulders the bench back
a field for play: that's over
exposed as video: fuzzy. Or is it Boston
Common: maybe May be:hind him?
Well: well light's be:hind him. Gray
shades his face: is it a tree
trunk's toppled roots' dark riot he sees
casts shadow on him: be:fore him? Only

an ear and flesh of part
of a neck in sunlight: some
of the right side of his shirt. A wish
bone drawing pinches brows:
parenthe-seizes lips: the eyes
dim be:cause of shadow: not him:
fright light white tight
pellets in pupils: absent in photo

flash his gaze that must be:spectacled.
Be:fore head shows a setting
sun reflected: light's spot on wavelet
thought not sinking yet. A warm
ear's drinking infant
light. Be:side him's morning in the spring
Park: a hot beam rubbing the right
side of his dark coat: baring
as if a gray breast there.

NOTICE

(On reading Paul Goodman's poem in The New York Review, 9/14/67)

Now we are talking
straight out to each other,
and for all to hear.
The common stream of our heads (our heart)
till now compartmented
perhaps begins to combine. Maybe to flow
unsurreptitiously together,
unembarrassed to know
we are one body (human)
helplessness and potency
the same circulation systeming
our veins. Paul Goodman
(well known, whom I don't know, and know
so well) breathing and thinking with you
in the same current (electric placenta
we all feed into, drink out of,
charger of every brain,
all blood) just now right here, I read
(with all the others who read)
your poem-prayer
on the death of your son,
so soon on reading
of his death, in the news. Then falling
(with him, with you, with all
the others who fall) a constant
mystery, the mountain down,
again I notice: Since mind first noticed
death, we fall. And how all
feel it (and conceal it)
the same tick-away, our massive
common heart in labor day after day.
Daring from now, perhaps,
to let go,
(the pretence of separate cells,
privacies, prides, singularities) let flow
away, like you, Goodman, we
(who are you, as you are us) may
(in the crack of recognition hurtling) publish
a piece of that heart.

001:2

• The New York Review, 9/14/67)

...are talking
...to each other,
...to hear.
...of our heads (our heart)
...to combine. Maybe to flow
...together,

...steming

...know, and know
...ing with you
...placenta
...of,

...I read
...read

...feeling

...faded

...flow

...flow

MAsterMANANiMAl

ANiMAtE MANANiMAl MAttress of Nerves

MANipulAtor Motor ANd Motive MAKer

MAMMALiAN MATrix MAT of rivers red

MortAl MANic Morsel Mover shAker

MAteriAl-MAster MasticAtor oxygeN-eAter

MouNtAiN-MouNter Mapper peNetrAtor

iN MoNster MetAl MANTle of the Air

MAssive wAter-surgeON prestidigitAtor

MACHiNist MASON MesON-Mixer MARble-heAver

coiNer cArver cities-idols-AtOMs-sMAsHer

electric lever Metric AlcheMist

MeNtAl AMAzer igNorANt iNcubAtor

cANNibAl AutoMANANiMAl cAllous cAlculAtor

Milky MAGNetic MAN iNNoceNt iNNovAtor

MAlleAble MAMMAL MercuriAl ANd MAteriAl

MAsterANiMAl ANd ANiMA etheriAl

t h e B E A M

How things really are we would like to know.
Does

T i m e

flow, is it elastic, or is it
atomized in instants hammered around the
clock's face? And

S p a c e,

is it
what we find around us in our place, or
"a symbol, suitably haunted, of the

M i n d?"

The

Mind?

A beam

fitfully focused, then dragged on. So
all material in its ken is lit,
consistent, tranquil as far as
that visitation lasts. When it is
withdrawn, when all we think and
know "goes out" where does it go? Into
a blind sink? No. It must find and drag
into its circle new material for its
being. Moving by

M i n d ' s

light,

which is slow,

M i n d

must move and warm
the groove, spot particles for another
seeing.

REDUNDANT JOURNEY

I'll rest here in the bend of my tail
said the python having traveled
his own length
beginning with his squared snout
laid beside his neck

O where does the neck

end and the chest begin

O where does the stomach

end and the loins begin

O where are the arms and legs

Now I'll travel between myself

said the python lifting his snout

and his blue eyes saw lead-gray

frames like windows on his hide

the glisten of himself the chill

pattern on each side

of himself and as his head slept

between the middles of himself

the end of his outer self still crept

The python reared his neck and yawned

his tongue was twins his mucous membrane

purple pink hibiscus sticky

He came to a cul de sac in the lane

of the center of his length

his low snout

trapped between twin windowed

creeping hills of himself

and no way out

I'll travel upon myself said the python

lifting his chin to a hill

of his inner length and while

his neck crossed one half of his

stomach his chest crossed his

loins while his tail lay still

But then he thought

I feel uncomfortable in

this upright knot

and he lowered his chin

from the shelf of himself

and tucked his snout in

How get away from myself said

the python beside himself

traveling his own side

How recognize myself as just myself

instead of a labyrinth I must travel

over and over stupified

His snout came to the end

of himself again to the final leaden bend

of himself

Said the python to his tail

Unconscious
came a beauty to my
wrist
and stopped my pencil,
merged its shadow profile with
my hand's ghost
on the page:
Red Spotted Purple or else Mourning
Cloak,
paired thin as paper wings, near black,
were edged on the seam side poppy orange,
as were its spots.

UNCONSCIOUS

CAME A BEAUTY

I sat arrested, for its soot haired
body's worm
shone in the sun.
It bent its tongue long as
a leg
black on my skin
and clung without my
feeling,
while its tomb stained
duplicate parts of
a window opened.
And then I
moved.

! ! ! !
CATBIRD IN REDBUD

! ! ! !
Catbird in the redbud this morning.
! ! !
No cat could
! ! ! !
mimic that rackety cadenza he's making.
! !
And it's not red,

the trapeze he's swaying on.

After last night's freeze,
! ! ! !
redbud's violet-pink, twinkled on
!
by the sun. That bird's
!
red, though, under the tail
!
he wags, up sharply, like a wren.
!
The uncut lawn hides blue
!
violets with stargold eyes on the longest

stems I've ever seen. Going to

empty the garbage, I simply have
!
to pick some,

reaching to the root of green,
!
getting my fist dewy, happening
! !
to tear up a dandelion, too.
!
Lilac, hazy blue-
! !
violet, nods buds over the alley
! !
fence, and (like a horse with a yen
!
for something fresh for breakfast)

I put my nose into a fragrant

pompom, bite off some, and chew.

GEOMETRID

Writhes, rides down
on his own spit,
lets breeze twist

him so he chins,
humps, reels up it,
munching back

the vomit string.
Some drools
round his neck.

Arched into a staple
now, high on green
oak leaf he punctures

for food, what
was the point
of his act? Not

to spangle the air,
or show me his trick.
Breeze broke

his suck,
so he spit
a fraction of self's

length forth, bled
colorless from within,
to catch a balance,

glide to a knot
made with his own mouth.
Ruminant

while climbing, got
back better than bitten
leaf. Breeze

that threw
him snagged him
to a new.

WHAT'S SECRET

Always the belly lighter than the back.
What grows in the shade pales,
what's secret keeps tender.

Inversion saves the silk of innocence.
Fierce melanosis of the adult coat
from whips of sun. The overt coarsens,

stripes and grins with color.
Exposure, experience thicken half the beast
who, shy as snow, stays naked underneath.

ROSIGNOLE TO THE CRITIC

Cats have only
their lives to save, while we
our souls (this means our

egos) must keep unslain. Power,
soul's blood, let from some slit
(a stab unnoticed until infected, it

made by the claw of Sneak,
the Cat) may leak
long poison, become a pustulate of self-hate,

paralyze the wings
and lock the little jaw
of Rosignole that sings.

WINDOW IN THE TAIL

Nap of cloud	ion not
as thick	of feather
as stuff-	but
ing tight	slat-
pack-	ted alum-
ed for	in-
a mat-	um
tress tick-	or other
ing pick-	
anin-	met-
ny kin-	al man-
ked and puff-	euverable
ed and white	by am-
as kid-	ple ram-
shear-	ps that
ed bel-	bevel
ly ruff	up or slide
	out wide
is the floor	and glide
and is the ceil-	our car-
ing o'er	riage level
which we're	
keel-	Over
ed and sail-	fur
ing on flat	of cloud
pin-	we travel

Nap of cloud, as thick as stuffing
tight packed for a mattress ticking,

pickaninny kinked and puffed
and white as kid-sheared belly ruff,

is the floor and is the ceiling
over which we're keeled and sailing,

on flat pinion-- not of feather--
but slatted aluminum or other

metal maneuverable
by ample ramps that bevel

up, or slide out wide
and glide

our carriage level.
Over fur of cloud we travel.

ON PARK AVENUE AT 52nd STREET

Spirits
are
dancing
here--
are
forced
to
dance.
They
are
forced
up
out
of
brass
rectums.

Pressed
from
rigid
slits,
they
shoot
tall,
out
of
the
floor
of
their
dark
basin.

Each
strains
to
be
whitest,
most
festive,
effervescent,
tossing
sparks
and
gouts,
white
"works
of
fire."

Throwing
up
their
heads,
they
catch
their
heads
on
shoulders
they
form
over
and
over.

They
lurch
laughter
and
hiss
wind
white
as
the
north.
Their
force
is
perpetual
mirth,
pressed

out
of
brass
rectums.
They
juggle
the
globulous
white
expectorations,
the
flakes
of
their
heads.

A TRELLIS FOR R.

B
L
U

E but you are R

o
s
e too

and buttermilk but with blood
dots showing through.
A little salty your white

nape boy-wide. Glinting hairs shoot
back of your ears' R

u
s
e that

tongue likes to feel
the maze of slip into
the funnel tell a thunder whisper to.
When I kiss

your eyes' straight lashes
down crisp go like doll's
blond straws. Glazed
iris R

o
s
e
s your lids uncloze

to B
l
u

e ringed targets their dark
sheen spokes almost green. I sink in

B
l
u

e black R

o
s
e heart holes until

you blink.

Pink lips the serrate
folds taste smooth
and R

o
s
e
h
i

p round the center
bud I suck. I milknip

your two B

l
u
e skeined blown R

o
s
e

beauties too to sniff their
berries' blood up stiff pink tips.
You're white

in patches only mostly R

o
s
e

buck skin and salty
speckled like a sky. I
love your spots your white neck R

o
s
e

your hair's wild straw splash
silk spools for your ears.
But where white spouts out spills

on your brow to clear
eyepools wheel shafts of light
R

o
s
e you are B

l
u
e.

= :
WEDNESDAY AT THE WALDORF

! + :
Two white whales have been installed at

:
The Waldorf. They are tumbling slowly

+
above the tables, butting the chandeleirs,

+ :
submerging, and taking soft bites

= = +
out of the red-vested waiters in the

: !
Peacock Room. They are poking fleur de lis

+ : :
tails into the long pockets on the

+
waiters' thighs. They are stealing

= : ! = =
breakfast strawberries from two eccentric

= :
guests-- one, skunk-cabbage-green with dark

peepers-- the other, wild rose and

= : + =
milkweed, barelegged, in Lafayette loafers.

! = = = +
When the two guests enter the elevator,

+ = ! :
the whales ascend, bouncing, through all

the ceilings, to the sixth floor. They

=
get between the sheets. There they turn

candy-pink, with sky-colored eyes, and

: = =
silver bubbles start to rise from velvet

+ : =
navels on the tops of their heads.

+ + X X =
Later, a pale blue VW, running on poetry,

: =
weaves down Park Avenue, past yellow

X X X
sprouts of forsythia, which, due to dog-do

X X X
and dew, are doing nicely. The two

+ X :
white whales have the blue car in tow

+ +
on a swaying chain of bubbles. They are

=
rising toward the heliport on the Pan Am

X
roof. There they go, dirigible and slow,

+
hide-swiping each other, lily tails flipping,

= =
their square velvet snouts stitched with

+
snug smiles. It is April. "There's

:
a kind of hush all over the world."

IN THE YARD

Dogwood's s n o w. Its ground's air.
R e d h e a d e d's riddling the phone pole.

Fat-tailed she-dog grinning's
t h r a s h e r - r e d.

It's the oriole there by the feeder
c h e d d a r under b l a c k bold head.

Neighbor doing yardwork's getting r e d.
Lifts tiles to a barrow.

L.I.R.R.'s four cars rollskate by
w h i t e potato blooms farside the field.

That square's our bedroom window.
You're not there. You're away

looking for nails or such
to put up a mirror frame the Adam

and Eve bright hair held back by a
r o b i n's - e g g - b l u e band.

Or you're at the body shop about
the broken bumper.

C a b b a g e b u t t e r f l y's found
h o n e y he thinks on r i n g

g l i n t s on my hand. I wait
for the r i n g n e c k who

noseblows twice parades his mate. She's g r a y.
Until comes the B l u e Bug crunching driveway.

You're back barefoot brought some fruit.
Split me a n a p p l e. We'll get r e d

w h i t e halves each our
juice on the Indian spread.

THE YEAR OF THE DOUBLE SPRING

Passing a lank boy, bangs to the eyebrows, licking a Snow Flake cone,
cones on the tulip tree up stiff, honeysuckle tubelets weighting a vine,
and passing Irene Gay - Realtor, The Black Whale, Rexall, and others-- (Irene,

don't sue me, it's just your sign I need in the scene)--
remembering lilac a month back, a different faded shade, buying a paper
with the tide table instead of the twister forecast on page three,

then walking home from the village, beneath the viaduct I find
Midwest echoes answering echoes that another, yet the same
train wakes here out East. I'm thinking of how I leaned on you, you leaning

in the stone underpass striped with shadows of tracks and ties,
and I said, "Give me a kiss, A.D., even if you are tranquilized," and I'm
thinking of the Day of Shooting, the Day of the Kingfisher, the Indigo

Day of the Bunting-- of the Catfish Night I locked the keys in the car
and you tried to jimmy in, but couldn't with a clothes hanger.
The night of the Juke at Al's-- When Something's Wrong With My Baby--

you pretended to flake out on the bench, and I poured icy Scotch into
the thimble of your belly, lifting the T-shirt. Another night you threw up
in a Negro's shoe. It's Accabonac now, instead of Tippecanoe.

I'm remembering how we used to drive to The Custard "to check out the
teenage boxes." I liked the ones around the Hondas, who
from a surly distance, from under the hair in their eyes, cruised the girls

in flowered shorts. One day back there, licking cones, we looked in
on a lioness lying with her turd behind the gritty window of a little zoo.

I liked it there. I'd like it anywhere with you.

Here there are gorgeous pheasants, no hogs, blond horses, and Alec Guinness
seen at The Maidstone Memorial Eve-- and also better dumps. You
scavenged my plywood desk top, a narrow paint-flecked old door

the broad white wicker I'm sitting in now. While you're at the dump
hunting for more-- maybe a double spring good as that single you climbed to
last night (and last year)-- I sit in front of a house, remembering

a house back there, thinking of a house-- where? when?-- by spring
next year? I notice the immature oak leaves, vivid as redbud almost,
and shaped like the spore of the weasel I saw once by the Wabash.

Instead of "to the Readmore" riffling Playboy, I found you yesterday
in that Newtown Lane newspaper store I don't yet know the name of.

Stay with me, A.D. Don't blow. Scout out that bed. Go find

tennis instead of squash mates, surfboarders, volley ball boys
to play with. I know you will, before long-- maybe among the lifeguards--
big, cool-coned, straight-hipped, stander-on-one-finger, strong.

HOW EVERYTHING HAPPENS (Based on a study of the Wave)

When nothing is happening something is stacking up to happen.

When it happens something pulls back not to happen.

When pulling back stacking up happens has happened.

When it has happened something pulls back while nothing stacks up.

Then nothing is happening.

Then something stacks up pushes forward and happens.

A PAIR

A he
and she,
prowed upstream,
soot-brown
necks,
bills the green
of spring
asparagus,

heads
proud figure-
heads for the boat-
bodies, smooth
hulls on feathered
water,

the two,
browed with light,
steer ashore,
rise; four
web-
paddles pigeon-
toe it
to the reeds;

he
walks first,
proud, prowed
as when light-
browed, swimming,
he leads

CAMOUFLEUR

Walked in the swamp	His cheek vermillion
A dazzling prince	
Neck-band white	Cape he trailed
Metallic mottled	
Over rain-rotted leaves	Wet mud reflected
Waded olive water	
His opulent gear	Pillars of the reeds
Parted the strawgold	
Brilliance	Made him disappear

The Blue Bottle

"Go	Baited
to the other	with
shore	words
and return"	and weighted
I wrote	I thought
in a note	"It will get away.
to the bottle	Get away
and put it in it.	with it" I
It kept it	thought
dry.	watching
I	the laps
could see	the lapse
through	listening
the blue	to the lisp
bottle blue	the lips
note paper	of the bay-
with blue ink	mouth
words.	making shore
The cork was tight.	making sure
It might	every rock got
make it.	rounded
Blue wavelets let	a little more
it go	today
began to	every pebble
take it.	pounded
Oh	brought
it hobbled	to ground
beyond the jetty	and rounded
rocks barnacled	to be gritted
and snailed.	to a grain
It bobbed	someday
snagged	some sum-day
on a crag	to be mounded
wagged	into rock again.
with its butt	Some fishermen
end butted	were fishing
but sailed	with little
so far that	fishes hooked
its glass	to hook
had to pass	bigger fish.
for glitter	And some they caught
among glitters	and cooked.
on the flat	And some they
glass	put on bigger
of the bay	hooks to get
and my	bigger fishes yet.
eye-	And all day
glass.	the bay

A SUBJECT OF THE WAVES: 1

The Boat Stave

Today while a steamshovel rooted in the cove,
leveling a parking lot for the new nightclub,
and a plane drilled between clean clouds

in the October sky, and the flags
on the yachts tied in the basin popped
in a stiff breeze, I watched my footsteps mark

the sand by the tideline. Some hollow horseshoe
crabshells scuttled there, given motion by the waves.
I threw a plank back to the waves that they'd

thrown up, a sun-dried sea-swollen stave
from a broken dinghy,
one end square, one pointed, painted green--

then became so conscious
of its fate my attention snagged,
could not get off the hook of its experience,

for I had launched a subject of the waves
I could not leave until completed.
Easily it skipped them, putting out,

prow-end topping every smack and swell,
and kept its surface dry, and looked to float
beyond the jetty head, and so be loose,

exchange the stasis of the beach for unconceived
fluidities and agitations. It set sail
by the luck of its construction:

Lighter than the forceful waves, it surmounted
their shove; yet, heavier, steadier than
the hollows they scooped behind them,

it used their crested threats for coasting free,
unsplashed by even a drop of spray,
was casual master

of the inconsistent element it rode.
But there was a bias to the moving sea.
Though the growth and motion of each wave was arbitrary,

the total spread, of which each crease was part--
the outward hem lying flat by the wall of sky
at the dim blue other end of the bed of the bay--

was being flung, it seemed, by some distant will.
Though devious and shifty in detail,
the whole expanse reiterated constancy

and purpose. So, just as the arrowy end of the plank
on a peak of a wave made a confident leap
that would clear the final shoal,

a little sideways breaker nudged it enough
to turn it broadside. Then a swifter slap
from a stronger comber brought it back,

erasing yards of its piecemeal progress with one push.
Yet the stave turned point to the tide, and tried again--
though not as buoyant, for it had got soaked.

But, arrogance undamaged, it conveyed
itself again over obstacle waves, a courageous ski--
not noticing, since turned from shore,

that the swells it conquered slid in at a slant--
and that while it met them head on, it was borne
closer to shore and shunted down the coast.

Now a bulge-- a series of them, for a pulse
quicken in the tide-- without resistance lifted
up the stave, flipped it over twice, and dumped it

rudely in the shallows. It scraped
on sand. And so it was put back--
not at the place of its first effort--

a greater disgrace than that--
at before the birth
of balance, pride, intention, enterprise.

It changed its hope and goal, and I changed
my ambition. Not the open sea--
escape into the rough, the wide unknown, and unpredictability--

but rescue, return, and rest--
station, release from influence-- became my hope
for the green painted, broken slat, once part of a boat.

Its trials to come ashore the cold
will of the waves thwarted more capriciously
than its assays into adventure made before,

and each chance it took to dig with its bent spike
a grip in the salvage of pebbles and weed and shell
was teasingly, tirelessly outwitted

by dragouts and dousings, slammings and tuggings
of the punishing sea. Until, of its own impulse, the sea
decided to let be,

and lifted and laid, lifted and laid
the plank inert on sand. At tide turn,
such the unalterable compulsion of the sea,

it had to turn
its back and rumple its bed
toward the other edge, the farther side of the spread.

I watched my footsteps mark the sand
by the tide-line. The steamshovel rooting in the cove
had leveled a parking lot for the new nightclub.

The launch from the yacht basin whooshed around the end
of the pier, toward a sailboat with dropped anchor there,
whose claxon and flipping flag

signaled for pick-up. The men with mallets had finished.
sinking posts by the gangplank entrance
of the abandoned boat, ballasted with cement

and painted green and black,
furnished with paneled bar and dining deck.
I watched them hang a varnished sign between the posts,

and letter the name: "The Ark." Tomorrow
I must come
out again into the sun,

and mark the sand, and
find my plank.
for its destiny's not done.

The Blue Bottle

"Go	Baited
to the other	with
shore	words
and return"	and weighted
I wrote	I thought
in a note	"It will get away.
to the bottle	Get away
and put it in it.	with it" I
It kept it	thought
dry.	watching
I	the laps
could see	the lapse
through	listening
the blue	to the lisp
bottle blue	the lips
note paper	of the bay-
with blue ink	mouth
words.	making shore
The cork was tight.	making sure
It might	every rock got
make it.	rounded
Blue wavelets let	a little more
it go	today
began to	every pebble
take it.	pounded
Oh	brought
it hobbled	to ground
beyond the jetty	and rounded
rocks barnacled	to be gritted
and snailed.	to a grain
It bobbled	someday
snagged	some sum-day
on a crag	to be mounded
wagged	into rock again.
with its butt	Some fishermen
end butted	were fishing
but sailed	with little
so far that	fishes hooked
its glass	to hook
had to pass	bigger fish.
for glitter	And some they caught
among glitters	and cooked.
on the flat	And some they
glass	put on bigger
of the bay	hooks to get
and my	bigger fishes yet.
eye-	And all day
glass.	the bay

smacked
 its lips big
 and little
 rocking big and
 little ships
 that smacked
 and rocked like
 oyster crackers
 in a dish.
 The tide was either
 going out or it
 was coming in.
 Not for an in-
 stant could it stop
 since its pulse compells
 it and since
 the syndrom swells.
 Since syn-rhythm
 rules all motion
 and motion makes
 erosion
 all that's munched
 apart and
 swallowed
 shifts collects is
 heaped and hollowed
 heaped and
 hollowed heaped
 and hollowed.
 All
 the little
 waves I
 followed
 out to where my
 bottle wallowed.
 I was sure sure sure
 I was shore shore
 it would endure endure
 would obey obey
 internal pulsion pulsion
 of the bay
 would turn turn
 return return
 with the turn- turn- turn-
 ing glassy floor
 that bore
 it for
 it wore
 internal or-
 der at its core.
 Constantly my
 eye

did pass
 over blue
 looking with blue
 for bluer
 blue
 on the bottle-blue
 bay-glass.
 When tide re-
 turned
 when shore re-
 stored
 my bottle's envelope
 of glass
 would be re-versed
 even though
 its core
 burst.

First
 erosion
 then corrosion
 then assemblage.
 It would be
 nursed
 again to
 vessel-shape
 transparent float
 hard hollow
 bladder
 transferred transplant
 holder of my note.
 In what
 language then
 the words the words within
 its throat?
 What answer? What
 other-colored
 ink?
 My
 blue eye
 thinking thinking
 blinked.
 My eye my
 I
 lost link
 with the blue chink
 with crinkled
 wavelets-lets-lets
 let it rising
 racing wrinkling
 falling
 be swallowed
 in that inkling

let it sink.

did pass
 over blue
 looking with blue
 for bluer
 blue
 on the bottle-blue
 bay-glass.
 When tide re-
 turned
 when shore re-
 stored
 my bottle's envelope
 of glass
 would be re-verses
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 falling
 be swallowed
 in that inkling

A SUBJECT OF THE WAVES: 3

The Stick

The stick is subject to the waves. The waves are subject to the sea. The sea is subject to its frame. And that is fixed, or seems to be.

What is it that the stick can do? Can tell the sky, "I dip, I float. When a wave runs under me, I pretend I am a boat. And the steersman and the crew, and the cargo, compass, map. With a notion of the shore. I carry all within my lap."

And when a wave runs over it, what is it that the stick decides? "From your bottom, cruel sea, you have torn me with your tides. I am a sliver from some boat, once swallowed to its water-deep. Why am I shifted, broken, lost? Let me down, my rest to keep."

The sea is subject to its frame.
 The waves are subject to the sea. The stick is subject to the waves.
 Or does it only seem to be?

What if the stick be washed ashore, and, gnawed by wind, scoured by sand, be taken up with other sticks, into a hand? On some predicated day, here is what the stick might say:

"Inside my border, a green sea flows, that while it flows is still. A white wall is around me, where I am fixed by someone's will, who made my shape into a frame, and in this corner drew his name."

F
I
R
E
I S L A N D

The Milky Way
above, the milky
waves beside,
when the sand is night
the sea is galaxy.
The unseparate stars
mark a twining coast
with phosphorescent
surf
in the black sky's trough.
Perhaps we walk on black
star ash, and watch
the milks of light foam forward, swish and spill
while other watchers, out
walking in their white
great
swerve,
gather
our
low
spark,
our little Way
the dark
glitter
in
their
s
i
g
h
t
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STONE GULLETS

Stone gulleets among Inrush Feed Backsuck and
The boulders swallow Outburst Hugh engorgements Swallow
In gulps the sea Tide crams jagged Smacks snorts chuckups Follow
In urgent thirst Jaws the hollow Insurge Hollow
Gushing evacuations follow Jetty it must Outpush Greed

ROCKY POINT

The mainland
looks much smaller than the island,
and faint,

implying thinner paint
brushed in last
as background,

so not as real.
Here is the present,
over there, the past.

Hard to feel
how it's the larger body.
That dream-haze

blue and green,
a low wave
of land,

is not clear,
or as solid as the water
in between

it and the rocky
point I stand
on. That's lifesized,

well-detailed with sunlit trees.
The island
is much bigger than the mainland.

This shore
is foreground. Why
have a figure with its back

turned, focused
on a streak
in the distance, a coast

it can't make out?
(Even the sun forgets
on foggy days.)

But that's the larger body,
that's a fact--
and would be again if I

were over there. Packed
with central life, it's the torso
this, at best, a leg.

No. A toe.
Well, even that is inexact.
If I think of the whole

body: what was vast
in retrospect, small
now, and thin in

the blue of forget,
it was, is, but a hand's
breadth. And

an island. All
that's earth is,
on the world's whirled

wavedrop.
And this now present outcrop
(that a magnified

wave grapples,
every fingernail
of foam real

to my thirsty eye--
I on a cliff before
the foreground--

the brush can't paint itself--)
is but a hair.
But oh it's mainland,

it's the moment's
ground I stand
on. It is fair.

A NOTE ABOUT ICONOGRAPHS

To have material and mold evolve together and become a symbiotic whole. To cause an instant object-to-eye encounter with each poem even before it is read word-after-word. To have simultaneity as well as sequence. To make an existence in space, as well as in time, for the poem. These have been, I suppose, the impulses behind the typed shapes and frames invented for this collection.

I call the poems Iconographs with such dictionary derivations in mind as these:

icon "a symbol hardly distinguished from the object symbolized"

icono- from the Greek eikōnos meaning "image" or "likeness"

graph "diagram" or "system of connections or interrelations"

-graph from the Greek graphē meaning "carve"... "indicating the instrument as well as the written product of the instrument"

Also, this comment on "The Art of the Middle Ages" (Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition) helped me choose the title:

"...(It) was governed by a kind of sacred mathematics, in which position, grouping, symmetry, and number were of extraordinary importance and were themselves an integral part of the iconography. From earliest times it has likewise been a symbolic code, showing men one thing and inviting them to see in it the figure of another..."

I suppose that these were my aims. But I come to definition and direction only afterwards. It has always been my tendency to let each poem "make itself"--to develop, in process of becoming, its own individual physique. Maybe this is why, once

the texts were fixed, I have wanted to give for each an individual arrangement in the space of the page.

I have not meant the poems to depend upon, or depend from, their shapes or their frames; these were thought of only after the whole language structure and behavior was complete in each instance. What the poems say or show, their way of doing it with language, is the main thing.

Poetry is made with words of a language. And we say, "But, of course." It is just this "matter of course" that poetry holds to the nostrils, sticks into the ears, puts on the tongue, flashes into the eyes of anyone who comes to meet it. It is done with words; with their combination--sometimes with their unstringing. If so, it is in order to make the mind re-member (by dismemberment) the elements, the smallest particles, ventricles, radicals, down to, or into, the Grain--the buried grain of language on which depends the transfer and expansion of consciousness-- of Sense. And no grain, of sense, without sensation. To sense then becomes to make sense.

With the physical senses we meet the world and each other --a world of objects, human and otherwise, where words on a page are objects, too. The first instrument to make contact, it seems to me, and the quickest to report it, is the eye. The poems in Iconographs, with their profiles, or space patterns, or other graphic emphases, signal that they are to be seen, as well as read and heard, I suppose.

May Swenson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ICONOGRAPHS is May Swenson's sixth published book of poems. She is Utah-born, but her main scene has been New York City until recently; she now lives in an "Adirondack shack" overlooking Long Island Sound at Sea Cliff, N.Y. After the printing of HALF SUN HALF SLEEP (1967) some fellow poets and the press had the following to say about her work:

"...(It) often appears to be proceeding calmly, just descriptive and accurate, but then suddenly it opens into something that looms beyond the material, something that impends and implies... her way is to define things, but the definitions have a stealthy trend..." WILLIAM STAFFORD in Poetry.

"...has a wholesome, earthy eroticism, wit and a love for experiment with forms, including typographical games that she manages to justify..." EDMUND FULLER in The Wall Street Journal.

"May Swenson leaps to the love of language and has a ball... is very much in the high baroque fashion of our time, and so much at home in it as to be one of its masters." KARL SHAPIRO in The New York Times Book Review.

"The publication of a volume of new poems by May Swenson is a happy and important event... Her remarkable capacity for the exact impression, her almost Oriental style with its precise, though often bizarre, imagery, and her enormous skill in many shapes and forms has produced an exquisite craftsman..." HOLGAR LUNDBERGH in The American Swedish Monthly.

"Through her language she probes existence, takes what is apart (and not in a surrealist, but in a scientific way that becomes through accuracy seemingly metaphysical) puts it together again... it then exists." HARRIET ZINNES in Prairie Schooner.

"...the visual physical arrangement is not related to form alone. It reflects the careful observation, the respect for the whole range of the senses... Her poems are not limited to linear time; they are patterns in space as well. The shaped poem represents... the aesthetic need for structure, a need met in other poets by the formal stanza or the syllabic or metric line. The enclosing of the poem within spacial boundaries... is especially appropriate... The territory May Swenson has invaded and penetrated more deeply than other moderns is that of the perceptible." ANN STANFORD in Southern Review.

"(She is) so possessed, now, of the means of her identity that the ritual, spellbinding, litaneutical elements of her art have grown consistent, even coincident, with her temporal, conditioned, suffering experience, and seem... no more than natural." RICHARD HOWARD in Alone With America, Essays on the Art of Poetry in the United States since 1950.

Honors to the poet include a Brandeis University Creative Arts Award & Citation, the Distinguished Service Gold Medal from Utah State University, the PSA Shelley Memorial Award and the Bryn Mawr College Donnelly Fellowship. She was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters 1970.